

Remarks

The various parts of the Office Action (and other matters, if any) are discussed below under appropriate headings.

Claim Objections

Claims 29 and 38 have been objected to because of several alleged informalities. Claims 29 and 38 have been amended, thereby rendering the objections moot.

Claim Rejections- 35 USC § 101

Claim 37 has been amended so as to render moot the rejection under 35 USC § 101.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

Claims 21-36 have been rejected as being unpatentable over US 5,923,733 (Binns) in view of US 2002/0076025 (Liversidge). Withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested for at least the following reasons.

The present application relates to schemes for allowing a user to initiate communications with one or more predefined groups of people. This can be achieved by associating a specified service address (e.g. a short code telephone number) with a defined group of people. Significantly, the defined group of people is specific to that user for that service address. The user can then send a text message to the members of the group by simply sending a conventional text message to the service address, and can initiate a conference call among the members of the group by simply placing a conventional voice call to the service address.

Binns, on the other hand, provides a scheme for distributing pre-recorded messages and faxes among a group of recipients. The group is associated with a telephone number that is specifically allocated to the group when it is first set up. The telephone number may be used by anyone to communicate with the group (e.g. to allow third-parties to send pre-recorded messages and faxes to the group).

It will thus be appreciated there are many differences between the present application and Binns. For example, the present application fundamentally relates to establishing voice conference calls and group text messaging, whereas Binns does not

mention either of these. Binns only relates to distributing prerecorded messages and faxes to a group of recipients.

In Binns the addresses of the group members are derived solely from the telephone number to which the communication is sent. That is to say, the relevant group of users is uniquely defined by the telephone number generated for the group when the group was first set-up. See, for example, Step S2008 in Figure 3 (and associated text at column 3, lines 51 to 56) and also Step S4002 in Figure 4 (and associated text at column 5, lines 62 to 64). This makes Binns a "public" scheme whereby anyone can use the same telephone number to communicate a message to the same group members.

The present application discloses a scheme where the addresses of the group members are derived from the identity of the user establishing the communication. That is to say, the same service address can be used by different users to communicate with different groups according to their own settings. This can be viewed as a "private" scheme whereby different users of the same service number are associated with different groups.

As set forth in claim 21, as amended, a telecommunications services apparatus is provided for use with a mobile telephone network, wherein the apparatus is configured to store addresses representing members of a group of users associated with a first user and a predefined service address. Further, the apparatus may be configured to retrieve the stored addresses of the members of the group of users on the basis of a combination of the predefined service number and the identity of the first user. Accordingly, the service address is not a unique telephone number generated when the corresponding group is set up (as in Binns), but is a number already allocated by the network.

To improve the overall clarity of claim 21, the phrase "at least one group" has been replaced with simply "a group". It will of course be understood that the term "a group" does not exclude further groups, and so "a group" and "at least one group" in effect have the same meaning. The claim has also been amended to make clear that the service address is predefined - i.e. it is not a unique telephone number generated when the corresponding group is set up (as in Binns), but is a number already allocated by the network.

Further, the claim has been amended to make even more clear that the addresses of the group of users are associated with the first user and the predefined service address. This was already apparent from the previous claim wording (i.e. from

the phrase "storing for a user" at line 3, and also the reference to the service address "corresponding to the...group..." at line 5), however, the amended wording is considered to be overall clearer. Additionally, claim 21 has been amended to recite that the stored addresses are retrieved on the basis of a combination of the predefined service number and the identity of the first user

Claim 21 is therefore not disclosed by Binns at least by virtue of the retrieved addresses (which define the members of the group) being based on the identity of the user instigating the communication, as well as the service address he uses.

In Binns, the retrieved addresses (i.e. the definition of the members of the group) are based solely on the uniquely allocated telephone number for the group. That is to say, the identity of the user instigating the communication is not used in Binns for determining which addresses are to be retrieved from the store.

As taught by the applicant, different groups can be associated with the same service address for different users. Thus, a network need only allocate a single predefined service address to provide multiple subscribers with the ability to set up a personal group. Similarly, by allocating nine service addresses (e.g. short code numbers 501 to 509 as in the specific example of the present application), subscribers have the ability to define nine different groups, e.g. for different groups of friends, family members, and so on. In Binns a separate service address is needed for each and every group defined by each and every user of the network. This can quickly become difficult to implement because of the sheer quantity of spare telephone numbers that would be needed, for example, if every subscriber was to be provided with the opportunity of defining nine groups.

Moreover, it would not be obvious to modify Binns to base the group definitions on the identity of the user instigating the communication because this goes against the whole point of Binns, which is to provide a scheme for allowing anyone (i.e. regardless of their identity) to send messages to members of a defined group simply by using the appropriate telephone number (e.g. see column 2, lines 33 to 39).

Accordingly, claim 21 is patentable over Binns, and this is true whether Binns is taken alone or in combination with Liversidge. This is because Liversidge also does not disclose basing group definitions on the identity of a user instigating a communication. In fact, Liversidge seems to be completely unrelated to both the present application and to Binns. Liversidge is directed to communications in virtual team environments using a special software application (see page 1, paragraph 0003). Nothing in Liversidge is seen as being relevant to conventional mobile telephone

networks or handsets for sending text messages or holding conference calls. That is to say, Liversidge is not in the same field of endeavor as Binns because Liversidge does not even relate to ordinary mobile telephone handsets.

For at least the foregoing reasons, claim 21 is patentable over Binns and Liversidge, whether taken alone or in combination. Similar comments apply to method claim 29.

The dependent claims recite still further features not found in a combination similar to that claimed. Inasmuch as the dependent claims are allowable for at least the same reasons as the claims from which they depend, the Examiner's comments in respect thereof need not be addressed and this should not be construed to be an acquiescence in the contentions made by the Examiner.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, request is made for timely issuance of a notice of allowance.

Respectfully submitted,

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